



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 December 2023

by **D Cramond** BSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 January 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/W/23/3324914

Greenacres Farm, Rockbourne Road, Coombe Bissett SP5 4LP

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Salarian Homes Ltd against the decision of Wiltshire Council.
 - The application Ref PL/2023/00746, dated 31 January 2023, was refused by notice dated 25 May 2023.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of the existing outbuilding to residential with parking and amenity area.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the appeal property is suitable for the development in principle having regard to local and national policy.

Reasons

3. The outbuilding forming the basis for this appeal is in a cluster of low-grade buildings in a farmyard type setting within an immediate area which also has a variety of less than 10 homes. This is a rural location, within an AONB, beyond any settlement formally recognised in planning policy terms. The building is referred to at times by both the Council and the Appellant as a barn but as per the application form, 'outbuilding' would be a better description as it is a low-level structure in pre-fabricated form with an unusual and unsightly random appearance including domestic style doors, a garage door and various windows in situ. The roof is lapped corrugated sheets with timber trusses and the interior is split into two compartments with a lightweight block wall. The floor is concrete and includes a drainage channel.
 4. The proposal is to form a 3-bedroom home with a defined parking and garden area. The dwelling would continue to be the same shape and size as the present outbuilding.
 5. The Wiltshire Core Strategy (CS) includes Core Policy (CP) 48 – Supporting rural life – which is most pertinent to this appeal scheme. The policy provides for the conversion of rural buildings and subject to criteria it ranks employment, tourism, cultural and community uses 'ahead' of residential development. The latter may be appropriate where there is clear evidence that none of the four favoured uses would be practical propositions. At this early point I would say I do have a concern which carries weight that I have no evidence whatsoever before me that, for example, some form of (neighbourly) employment or tourist related use could not come forward.
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6. CS CP 48 goes further in that *even these uses* would have to satisfy the policy's more detailed criteria and be checked accordingly.
7. Before looking at any criteria I will make brief reference to a 2022 appeal decision (APP/Y3940/W/21/3284461) which is cited extensively by both principal parties. This was for conversion of an outbuilding in very close proximity to the current appeal property. The appeal was dismissed. The building was not redundant or disused – it failed that test - and so by my reading the Inspector did not, and did not need to, consider in detail any further aspects or controlling criteria of CS CP 48. As a separate issue the Inspector was satisfied on character and appearance grounds and pertinent policies CS CP 51 and CP 57. Upon declared redundancy of the building a subsequent planning permission has been granted by the Council (ref PL/2022/07815) with the applicants and the Council both considering that the Inspector had, once the building was empty, effectively given the green light to the conversion under the applicable policy headings. As may be ascertained from the foregoing I have some doubts about this but, in any event, I must assess the scheme before me on its merits and with my consideration of applicable policies.
8. Returning to CS CP 48, within it of particular pertinence to my mind is the need for the building to be structurally sound and capable of conversion without major rebuilding (i), the planned use not to detract from the qualities of the landscape (ii), and reasonable access to local services (iv).
9. I have carefully considered evidence provided by the Appellant and I have to say that on its basis I would align with the Council on the question of whether the building was structurally sound and capable of conversion without major rebuilding as per the criteria (i) test. It seems to me that, in summary, a new roof covering, new roof joists, new doors and windows, new cladding to walls internally, new cladding to walls externally, new internal walling, new floor insulation and finishing (assuming footings are acceptable albeit not checked), new damp prevention work, new services provision are all amongst the matters that would be required. The definition of major rebuilding may be open to debate but I would categorise these works as within that heading. In my eyes the works involved would be beyond the conversion scope provided for in CS CP 48 criteria (i) and more tantamount to building a new dwelling in this AONB status countryside.
10. I shall consider the question of landscape qualities later but suffice it to say at this stage I am not convinced that CS CP 48 criteria (ii) is complied with via the appeal scheme.
11. The site is rural, albeit settlements with local services are more proximate than for many such areas. Nevertheless, it is hard to envisage any access being made to these local services by any means other than a private car given the nature of the A354 and limited other routing options. In terms of a sustainable settlement pattern residential development at the appeal site would not feature and only if there were other over-arching or out-weighting positive attributes to a scheme would this need for travel by private car, even with an EV charger as part of the scheme, be reasonably sanctioned in my opinion.
12. In all the circumstances I conclude that the appeal proposal would run contrary to CS CP 48.
13. I would add that CS CP 48 does not conflict with less detailed national policy as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). On the

matter of conversion to residential uses of redundant buildings in rural areas (assuming such a 'conversion' was applicable) a key requirement is the need to enhance a site's immediate setting.

14. The Council touches on what it considers to be the poor visual quality of the building and that it would class the proposed scheme to be of similarly utilitarian appearance. From my perspective I would entirely concur. The existing building, from close range, is something of an eyesore and the planned dwelling would be very mundane in appearance. I do not see the planned change as an effective, necessary, or only, way of seeking to improve the current visual situation. As well as running contrary to CS CP 48 (ii) I conclude that this appeal scheme would not represent a high standard of design which is called for in CS CP 57 and the Framework.
15. Furthermore, I am not persuaded that this scheme would be neutral or beneficial in landscape terms for the AONB. I appreciate that my colleague on the previously cited appeal decision did express positivity on this front on a conversion but that was a different scheme on a separate nearby building of varying form. I would say that the Appellant, and the Council in part, reads too much into that commentary. Also, it is pertinent that a close-knit accumulation of any more new residential development would only compound visual impacts of garden boundaries and garden use of land, parking provision and domestic paraphernalia on a former farmyard site in a rural area in an AONB. To this end I would conclude that the scheme would run contrary to CS CP 48 criteria (ii) and landscape related CS CP 51, a policy referenced by both principal parties in the appeal paperwork. It would also conflict with the parallel objectives of the Framework.

Other matters

16. I recognise the shortfall in the five-year supply of housing land. However, the contribution from the scheme would be extremely modest and I am of the view that this appeal scheme by reason of its location and nature would not reasonably be termed sustainable development.
17. I have carefully considered all the points raised by the Appellant but these matters do not outweigh the concerns which I have in relation to the main issue identified above.

Overall conclusion

18. For the reasons given above I conclude that the proposed development would not be suitable in principle having regard to local and national policy. Accordingly, the appeal is dismissed.

D Cramond

INSPECTOR